

1929

Extract from "Qantas Rising" by Sir Hudson Fysh

The year 1929 was packed with aviation history and drama. About the time of the opening of our Brisbane-Charleville service came the Kookaburra and Vickers Vellore searches by L. J. Brain in our Longreach-built Bristol-Jupiter-engined DH50J Atalanta - both successful searches which made history for Brain and his aeroplane.

Kingsford Smith and Ulm, after their successful crossing of the Pacific Ocean, went on to be the first to fly from Australia to New Zealand, and to create other Australian records. They then began to organize a company to begin regular air-route operations in Australia, having mainly in mind linking up the eastern capital cities, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

On 31st March 1929, with Litchfield and McWilliams, they set off from Sydney in the Southern Cross for England, where they were negotiating for the purchase of Avro X aircraft for the new service. Their first objective was Wyndham in north-west Australia.

When they were nearing their objective very bad visibility was experienced and with a defective radio they were forced to land on a mud-flat. To the rest of the world they simply disappeared into the blue.

Woods of West Australian Airways, who was nearest the locality, made extensive searches, but it was not till twelve days after the landing that Les Holden flying a DH61 aeroplane discovered them and they were rescued.

Meanwhile K. Anderson and H. S. Hitchcock in a small and totally unsuitable Westland III aircraft named Kookaburra had set out to search for the Southern Cross and they, in turn were reported missing over bad desert country in the far interior.

On 19th April, when they had been missing for nine days, we received an urgent request from the Citizens' Search Committee in Sydney to set out. It was then that the Defence Department came into the picture and asked us to join the new search, switched from the now-discovered Southern Cross.

The Defence Department sent out three Air Force machines and on 19th April L. J. Brain in charge of the DH50J Atalanta set out from Brisbane with Engineer Compston and Radio Officer F. W. Stevens, properly

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equipped for survival in the desert should the necessity arise, Brain was an old hand at flying over the far interior.

On 21st April, towards the end of a rapid dash from Brisbane, they were nearing their objective of Wave Hill, which had been set up as a search depot, when Brain saw smoke going up from a burning bush area away to the south. When wisely they investigated, there sure enough was the Kookaburra, intact but on ground too rough to land the Atalant. The position was 80 miles south-east of Wave Hill.

Flying low almost at ground-level, they saw a body lying under the wing of the Kookaburra, but there was no sign of the other member of the crew.

A land expedition was then organized, in which Flight Lieutenant Eaton of the R.A.A.F. went out with others and located the Kookaburra. The body of Hitchcock was recovered under the wing, and that of Anderson about 40 yards away.

A rough diary had been scribbled on the wing, but little was known of the last tragic days of the two flyers marooned without proper supplies and water. Even the alcohol in their compass had been drunk.

The Daily Guardian brought Atalanta and Brain to Sydney, and paid well for the story and photographs. (Note:-) I understand the photographs were taken with a small box camera Fred took with him, and I remember Fred telling me they locked them in a Hotel Room at Bondi to stop them giving the story to another paper. )